

# City of Austin State of Bicycling Address

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*This holiday season, on the heels of a much anticipated and celebrated jump to a 2% city-wide bicycle mode split, I am inspired to begin an annual public communication on the State of Bicycling in Austin. I want not only to thank the community and countless City staff for the support and involvement that helped us arrive at 2%, but to also get 2013 off to a start with some excitement about what is on the horizon.*

## The long awaited 2%



First let me define the significance of the long awaited “2%”. This measurement is produced by the American Community Survey, a service of the U.S. Census, and quantifies the number of people who regularly use a bicycle for commuting to work. The American Community Survey (ACS) is an ongoing survey that provides data every year – giving communities the current information they need to plan investments and services. It provides a wide range of demographic data, which includes a “Journey to Work Table”.

Many U.S. cities fall below 2% city-wide, while others like Portland far exceed 2% (7% for 2011). 2% could be a tipping point based on the information from the Portland Bureau of Transportation that separates bicyclists into four categories, as seen below:

### Four Types of Transportation Cyclists in Portland:

By Proportion of Population



We have seen that standard bicycle lanes and improved connections can attract bicyclists from the “Enthused and Confident” category, and start moving the mode split towards 7%. The quantity and quality of Austin’s bicycle facilities installed over the last few years mimic Portland’s in the 1990’s, so perhaps we are on our way to that 7%. However, Austin is now focused on a new generation of bicycle facilities aimed at the “Interested but Concerned” category, with focus on the installation of protected bicycle lanes, or “cycle tracks”. We hope this will keep us on the right track over the next several years, and perhaps help us realize our 7% sooner than later.

## How did we do it?



*Building on the experiences of past City bicycle programming, the last five years have been marked by record-breaking successes in building a bicycle friendly Austin. I'd like to specifically mention three aspects of that success:*

- 1 Parking Modification Guidelines "PMG"**
- 2 The Bicycle Advisory Council**
- 3 The Support of the City Administration**



The approximate 30 linear miles of new and improved bicycle lanes per year, on average, have been a product of a successful planning process called Parking Modification Guidelines, or PMG. The process is designed to administer a specific objective of the Austin Bicycle Plan, which states, "The Bicycle Program Manager will work on a case-by-case basis with residents, neighborhood associations, and the bicycle community to determine local needs for parking and bicycle lanes." Through this process, relevant City staff engages the community and discusses the idea of "**complete streets**". The process allows us to adjust planned improvements based on customer feedback and create a successful project, and has been implemented on over 50 street corridors in the last 5 years.

Another indirect, but important, aspect of this PMG process is the simple act of getting out into the community and talking about bicycling. One of the things that stood out to me in reading *Joy Rides*, by former Portland Bicycle Coordinator Mia Birk, is her advice about getting out there and talking to people. That certainly wasn't the only thing that started to move Portland's mode split numbers, but it definitely contributed. I feel strongly that the PMG process that has us out in the community talking to people about bicycle commuting has helped Austin reach the 2%.



When there is debate on design aspects of a PMG project, the **Bicycle Advisory Council (BAC)** has proven to be a Tour de Excellence! With a mix of long-time bicycle advocates, community members, and those new to Austin and its bicycling, the new and improved BAC has emerged in the last five years to be a well-oiled machine. This group, holding its nine member elections each Fall and meeting once per month, has helped shape many of the Bicycle and Urban Trails Program facilities, programs,

and processes that are in place today.



Plan— a plan that recognized the importance of bicycles to the future of the Downtown. This is in addition to coordinating with the Bicycle Program to assure new private developments are thinking about bicycle access and improvements on a regular basis.

- **Parks and Recreation** has offered assistance with multi-use trails and trees, since we all love shade on our bicycles routes, don't we?
- Bicycle Defensive Driving Courses, the Austin Bright Cyclists Campaign, and the "Talks with the

They also represent us as "eyes on the street" and often bring projects and ideas to our attention. In this way, the City staff can be both proactive and reactive in response to making Austin a great place to ride a bicycle.

Finally, support for complete streets and its bicycling component have never been stronger at the City. The Bicycle Program works with multiple City Departments on a regular basis, assisting us with planning, development and navigation of how our Program fits into the city as a whole.

- The Austin Strategic Mobility Plan, sponsored by the **Austin Transportation Department**, is an excellent multi-modal effort to analyze and evaluate our transportation system in heading toward our plan for the future.

- Our friends in **Planning and Development Review** completed the Downtown Master

Chief" series have all been great programs developed in concert with the **Austin Police Department and our Municipal Court system.**

- **Health and Human Services** has been a partner through the Healthy Built Environment Code & Criteria Manual amendments, and our Safe Routes to School program.
- Most people wouldn't realize how much work the **Law Department** provides us when putting together amendments to City law, like the Bicycle Parking Code Amendments.
- **Economic Growth and Redevelopment** helped us secure the Dutch "ThinkBike!" event, continue important work on the Seaholm District's Bowie Underpass, and Art in Public Places Bicycle Racks.
- Through the assistance of our City's **Purchasing Department**, we are poised to move forward to bring Bike Share to Austin.

## So, what's next?



2013 will be a spectacular and busy year for the Bicycle and Urban Trails Program and for citizen involvement. We have several programs and projects planned in 2013 that will help us towards our City Council goal of a 5% mode split by 2020 (did I mention we hit the Council-set goal of “2% by 2015” a bit early?). I assure you that the public will be made aware of how to get involved throughout 2013 – especially with some of these projects:

- I'm happy to announce that the City Bicycle Program, through a grant from the Bikes Belong Foundation, will kick-off an **amendment to the City Bicycle Plan** to align with the new Imagine Austin Comprehensive Plan. We will build this new vision together with Austin citizens during the public input processes planned for mid-2013. This will include re-thinking our bicycle network to include more protected facilities or “cycle-tracks” geared towards attracting the “Interested But Concerned” type of bicyclist.
- We will also begin a planning process to create an **Urban Trails Master Plan** and amend the **Transportation Criteria Manual**. Sponsored by the Public Works Department, these two projects will coordinate with relevant City departments and provide opportunities for community input. They will plan for multi-use trails that can better serve both recreational and transportation functions, and also assure transportation facility design criteria are based on current best practices and aligned with Imagine Austin, respectively.
- In 2012, the City won entry into the national **Green Lane Project**. This two year project positions Austin with five other cities (San Francisco, DC, Portland, Memphis, and Chicago) who are serious about creating a protected bicycle lane network and who are becoming U.S. leaders in bicycle transportation. This year, cycle tracks on Rio Grande Boulevard and Bluebonnet Lane were implemented, and portions of Barton Springs Road are under construction now. The City will also implement the Lance Armstrong Bikeway 3<sup>rd</sup> Street segment, and facilities within the Mueller Development as part of the two-year effort.
- Perhaps one of the most exciting and visible items to emerge in 2013 to help us toward 5% is **Bike Share**. Once up and running, we will join cities like Denver, San Antonio, Washington, DC, and Minneapolis, who all enjoy successful Downtown Bike Share programs. People living in communities with Bike Share liken it to cell phones, nobody understands how people functioned downtown prior to Bike Share – it's simply become a necessary and convenient part of life. Bike Share has also proven transformational in encouraging people to use their personal bicycle for transportation more often.

*In closing, I hope you agree that the City of Austin is well on its way to 5%, and as we push towards that goal, we will see more bicyclists on the street. And with that – comes safety in numbers! I look forward to communicating the many bicycle and urban trail Capital Improvement Projects that will be underway in the next update in March. Happy New Year and Happy Cycling!*